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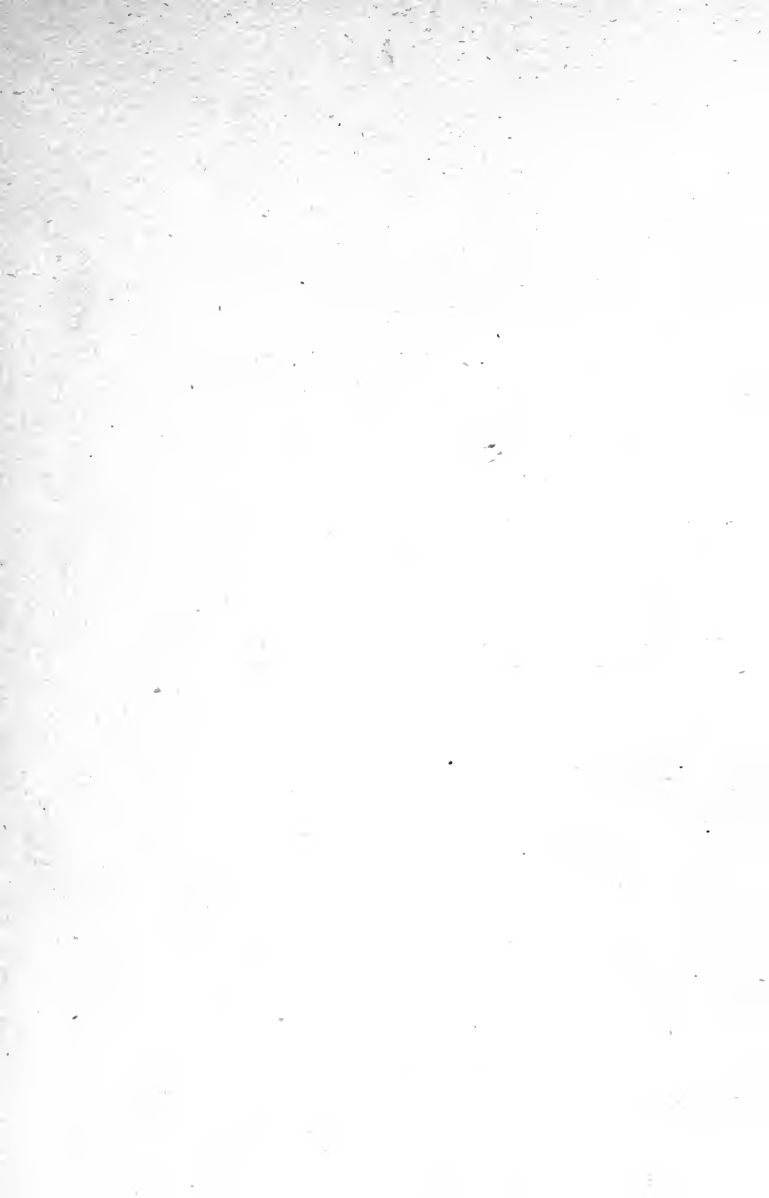
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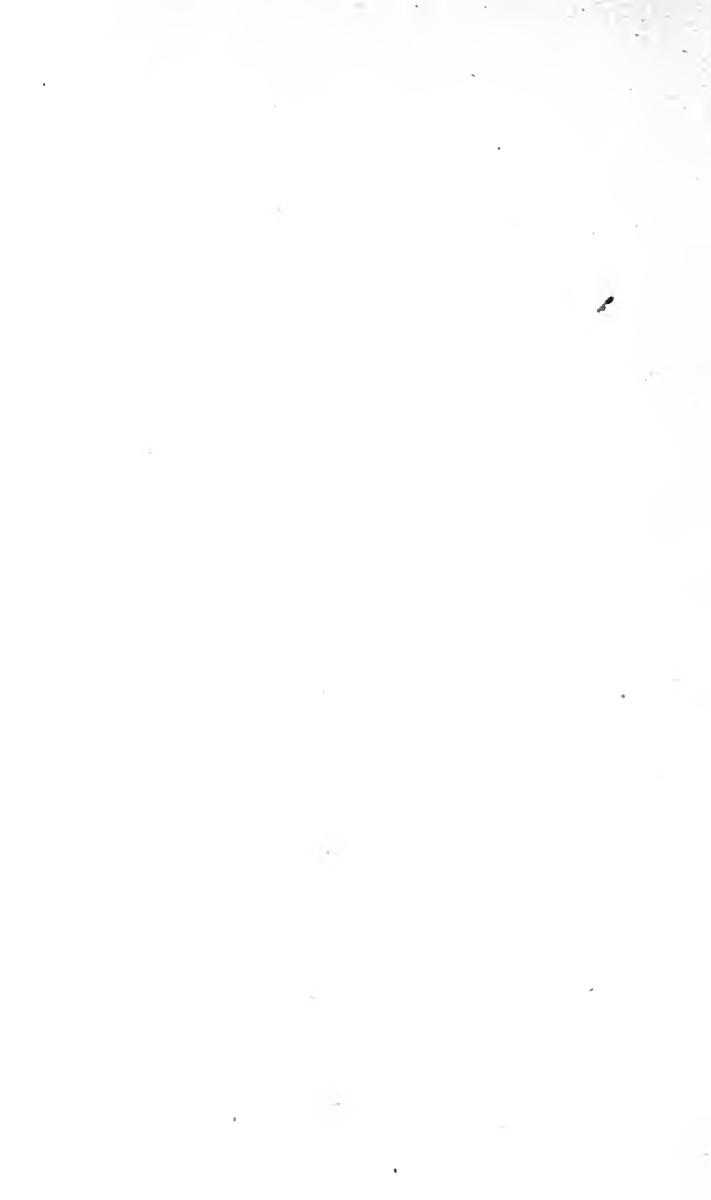
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AS A FALLING STAR







AS A FALLING STAR

By
ELEANOR GAYLORD PHELPS

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This little story is dedicated, with affection, to
the sweet memory of a child cousin whom I count
among those angels who have come to Earth while
"Saint Peter slept."

E. G. P.





AS A FALLING STAR

I.

"One night, as old Saint Peter slept,
He left the gates of Heaven ajar,
When through a little angel crept,
And came to earth as a falling star."

— E. C. M.

JOHN and I have come to be very dear friends. This I realize more and more daily. A very deep love seems to have grown out of our perfect understanding of one another. Was it only by chance that this dear love and friendship was made? No, I prefer to believe that an overruling Spirit sent me to him; that his good angel prompted him to stretch out his baby hands to mine, and to look beseechingly

into my eyes. I could not resist inquiring of the nurse about him, I am sure. She shook her head very slowly, and said nothing for a moment to my inquiry; and then she replied, very gently —

“Miss Eleanore, we know nothing. We found him on the hospital steps some mornings since. He was rolled up in a bundle of very fine linen, and dressed in very delicate lawn. The undergarments were all exquisitely hemstitched and daintily embroidered. When we picked him up his great brown eyes looked wonderingly into ours, and then a sweet smile covered his perfect face.” While the nurse was telling me this, he turned over in his crib and stretched out his hand across the coverlid toward mine. The very light of the angels seemed to shine from his beautiful countenance, and I followed an irresistible inclination to kneel beside the crib. The little eyelids closed, and the exquisitely chiselled features

were the picture of peace. He seemed soothed by my presence, or I fancied that he did, and a deep love for the forlorn little one crept into my soul in that moment and I lingered on my knees for a little time. And a silent prayer was on my lips and in my heart for one of God's little ones.

"Ah, is he ill, nurse?" I found myself asking.

"No, not ill, Miss Eleanore, but very unfortunate."

And I could not but shudder, for intuitively I seemed to feel that some member of his fragile body was lacking in vigor and health.

"One little leg is withered, Miss Eleanore, and he will never walk without crutches, so the physicians say."

And the pathetic eyes opened once again, as the tiny fingers clutched at my hand; and then and there I promised myself the future care of little "John," for so I named him. Of

a sudden Andrea del Sarto's child Saint John came before me, and the thought with it: "Great Master, that little face that you put upon canvas so many years ago has become an ideal child countenance in the heart of many a woman." And with the spiritual countenance of little Saint John the Baptist, still in my mind, I could not help making a silent comparison.

"You resemble that face, my baby John. My dream is to be realized in part, for we have found each other. And now, with God's permission, I may call you 'my John.' I shall never forget that bleak day one November when I brought you home with me, and you nestled down in my arms, and I fancied that perhaps you realized that I was lonely, that I needed you, and for this you might grow to love me. We are one another's natural protectors, John. God sent you to me, did he not?"

And the infant's response was only a sad sweet little smile, which lingered for a moment like a truant shadow, and then died away and left a depth of suffering on the even then patient face.

"I never had to think of any other but myself, before you came, little John. Mother and father ever made a pet of me, and every thought was for my happiness. And Tom! ah, he loved me, too. But they have all gone away, never to return except in the spirit, little John."

What a blessing it is, Eleanore, that a child has come into your life, that it may cease to be a lonely, barren existence, — and such it was before you came, with mother, father, and sweetheart gone away to the land from which, I am certain, little John came. God knew that I was all alone, that my life had come to be a very narrow one, that my sorrow was very great, that I was fast becoming

very selfish — and He sent little John to me.

My little apartment never before looked so attractive as it did on that evening when I brought John, the dear child with the withered leg, away from the hospital and home with me. The night was a clear one, and the stars made both the heavens and the earth luminous by their brightness. As we passed along up the avenue, I could not but glance out of the carriage door, and doing so, was just in time to note a falling star come to earth, and I like to fancy that there was a deep spiritual significance in the fact of its having appeared on that very night. The gates of Heaven were left unbarred, surely, and the angel child must have gotten by Saint Peter and fluttered to this world, — and could it be that I was holding him in my arms?

The good nurse came from the hospital with us, but she retired at an early hour, leaving John and me and the glowing embers

to each other. I lifted him from his crib, when she had closed the door of her chamber behind her, and held him there in my arms. For the first time the full responsibility of the trust came to me, and I realized that to me was given in keeping the care of one of God's very elect.

Little lips, they shall never know the word "mother," since it is "His will be done." Your mother has put you from her because of your deformity, it would seem, and I am only God's stewardess. I believe that the angels have asked me to stand guardian for them, and with the help of the Mighty Host, I will.

II.

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting ;
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar ;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home :
Heaven lies about us in our infancy."

—*Wordsworth.*

THE days are much alike for John and me, but such happy days! Never has there come a moment in which I have regretted finding, taking, knowing, loving, little John. He does n't seem to grow as fast as most children do, but the spirit quite develops beyond human conception, and sometimes I fear that the little soul will become too great for the fragile body to harbor, and that he will fleet away beyond my grasp.

John is getting to that age when he wishes to call me by some name, and I fancied one day, not long ago, that he attempted to pucker his little lips into the word "mother"; but I knew that I must never encourage this, though the temptation was very great. It is only natural for every woman, some time in her life, to wish a child to utter that word to her. If John were as strong of body as most children, I might have been tempted to allow the word to form upon his baby lips, but I knew that he must never have the mental sorrow of the question, "Are you my mother?" But the day will come when little John will reason for himself, and when I look into his sorrowful brown eyes, I sometimes fancy that I can discover an inquiring expression there. And then, after a moment's thought, I realize that he is only a babe, and that I am interpreting my own fears.

III.

"My soul is not untutored now,
Even words and tongues for me have might;
My thought has learn'd a calmer flow,
And the dark waters leap in light."

— *Cecil Alexander.*

PEOPLE often come to see John and me. Our apartment is very attractive, or at least we think so. John's room is bright and cheerful, and the white curtains seem to reflect only the purity of his spotless soul. The walls are covered with the most attractive pictures that I could find for a boy's room.

This afternoon, several of my old school friends who are now married were in to see me. They impressed me as being so happy, and I can but think of what my own life would have been, had Tom lived.

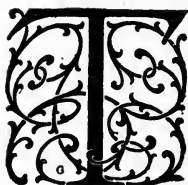
Dr. Leech, the ward physician at the hos-

pital, dropped in to chat with us for a while just after sunset. He always seems to enjoy our tea and our books and our pictures, and hearing of little John. I believe he loves the boy dearly. It was he who first discovered him that morning when his unnatural parents had left him to shiver on the hospital steps. Dr. Leech is a very tender man with children, and with other people there is a charm of reserve and timidity which we seldom see, alas ! in the modern successful man. I think that I enjoy his companionship because he knew Tom, and it was he who created the diversion for me of going to the hospital to read and chat with the little ones. Precious John ! if it had not been for Dr. Leech, I might never have known, never have found you.

IV.

"Now fades the last long streak of snow;
Now bourgeons every maze of quick
About the flowering squares, and thick
By ashen roots the violets blow."

— *Tennyson.*



THE days are warm and spring-like. The sleeping year has awakened from its long winter's slumber, and the gentle breezes of Spring have fanned into being all the lesser manifestations of the gladsome, hopeful season; and with these spring days, it seems to me, John's soul has had a new awakening, too. This morning he called me to him, and used my name, for he knows it well now, and says it quite as plainly as one older would.

"Eleanore, John wants you."

Perhaps I should feel superstitious about the boy's using his name in speaking of himself,

but I am not. He is very respectful to others, and seems to possess a rare sense of avoiding even familiarity in speaking of himself. This reverence which he appears to have for every creature is as unusual as it is refreshing. He has learned to know my favorite picture now, and when I ask him which of all the others I most like, his frail little hand will wander from frame to frame, and finally rest upon the beautiful features of Andrea del Sarto's little "Saint John."

The nurse has left us now, and I take sole care of little John, which is for me the sweetest of tasks. We sit much of the time in the high window-seat overlooking the house-tops of this vast city, and together watch the sunset and the horizon lighted up by its last wonderfully colored rays of light. And he coos and laughs, and often relaxes into a spirit of seeming thoughtfulness, and then



nestles closely to me, and I to him, for we love each other dearly.

Tom comes to me sometimes in my dreams and seems to say, "Eleanore, it is better so," and I fear that I awake choking. Tom was all that I hope little John will grow to be — a poetic, noble soul, with a heart as good and as true as ever God gave me the lot to know and love.

It is Tom's birthday. He would be thirty-five if he were living. Let us pretend that he is, John. But what would he say to you here? You were not mine when he left me. I can picture easily now how naturally he would walk into the room, as he used to into our library at home when I was a girl, and my parents were with me.

"Ah, Eleanore," he would say, "and what have you been about all this long day, my sweetheart? Tell me about yourself, and

then read to me, while I lose myself for a moment in the world of the flame — with your permission, dear.”

Tom was always gallant, John; a true gentleman always is. Ah, but your baby understanding does n't grasp what I am saying. How could I expect it to? Forgive me, dear little one. You have so taken the others' places, those who have gone away from me, that I talk to you, in my half-spoken reveries, as I used to with them.

The Easter-lilies are very nearly dead. What short-lived waxy creations they are. But I love them, for we were to have been married at Easter-time. How majestically the lilies would have bowed their heads to Tom. They, I am sure, would have recognized his goodness, John, just as I did.

V.

"Ah, what pleasant visions haunt me
As I gaze upon the sea,
All the old romantic legends,
All my dreams, come back to me."

— *Longfellow.*



UMMER has come. Our apartment in town is closed. The books are shut in behind glass doors. The clock with the chimes, that stands in the hall, has run down. The pictures hang unrecognized as old friends, and the window-seat is unoccupied, for John and I are in the country, by the sea. He is growing much these summer days. A little country boy in blue jeans wheels him about in the sunshine, over the farms and through the village streets.

John smiles at the passers-by, and when some fond, doting spinster offers him a bunch

of her choicest posies from her aristocratic garden, he kisses her hand and says, "John thanks you," in such a manner as to charm the kind-hearted woman and make it her chief delight to tell her neighbors and friends of the occurrence many times during the following weeks.

Long Island is very beautiful, and this quaint little village by the sea, the oldest on the island, has its bit of history and its romances. There are four churches here in this village, and John makes a tour of them all on Sundays. The clergymen have taken a very great fancy to the boy, and John is yet too young to be annoyed by religious problems. He is almost five now, and his beautiful eyes are full of a remarkable depth of feeling.

Patience! What a lesson it is that one learns from my John. His soul seems to rise above his bodily suffering, and the very

light of heaven seems to shine from under the long lashes that fringe the deep brown eyes. His blue linen suits he calls "white caps."

"Eleanore," he said to me one day, when we were seated on the drifting sands and playing with the shells that had come in with the last rise of the tide, "the waves have white faces to-day."

"John, if it were the ocean instead of the bay, I should call them 'white caps.'"

"White caps, did you say, Eleanore? Then my sailor suits have white caps, too, have n't they?"

The people of the village are very kind to John, and he likes them genuinely. We were on the meadows one day not long since, and a dear old farmer stood near us, swinging his scythe to the music of the splashing of the waters on the shore not far distant. John, in his effort to reach the old man, slipped from his cart and fell forward. The kind

old farmer put down the scythe on the newly-cut meadow-grass, and hurried toward us.

“What a beautiful boy, lady. ’Spose you ’re from ’York. Most all those who are a-summerin’ ’bout here are from thar. Ah, did it hurt you, little man? Are you stayin’ at Bay Side Farms?”

And on my response that we were stopping with my grandfather up the lane a way, at South Harbor, the old man seemed to have heard of us before.

“Oh, you be the good young lady that I heerd tell of who lives for the little cripple. Where’s the young man who was follerin’ around after you when you used to come down here on the island? — Mr. Tom McGilvey, I believe, was his name. I was laid up with the rheumatiz that summer, and as for gettin’ ’bout ag’in I dun give up all hope. But, do you know, that young man of yours cheered me up most wonderful.”

But he must have caught the look of pain, mingled with interest, on my face, for he ceased to speak, turned around with his back to my face, and looked away apologetically across the bay, and at the sails fleeting over the waters toward Shelter Island, as the sea-gulls had before them. I could not answer him for a time, and then I remember saying :

“ Ah, those were very happy days, Captain. Mr. Tom McGilvey has gone away. You, perhaps, have not heard. He will never again come to the shores of your beautiful island. He died at the end of that summer you speak of, and I have been, oh, so lonely ever since.”

“ An’ your mother and father, they ’re gone too, I heerd tell,” he continued, turning about and looking toward me, his eyes full of sympathy, and his lips quivering for very pity of forlorn me. “ Well, young lady, you is certainly brave, — but the boy, he loves you,” he

said, laying his rough brown hand on John's shoulders.

The child turned his little face toward me, then looking into the Captain's kind old face, and pressing my hand very gently, he said:

"John loves Eleanore, oh, so much, Captain, and everybody does."

Oh, the innocence of a child's adoration. Little John, you can never know how near being an angel you are. One has but to look into your saintly face to realize that there is a greater depth of feeling there than in that of the average child, perfect of body.

John does n't seem to tan as most children do. The sunlight appears to play only with his dark brown locks and create wonderful strands of gold to light up the duller ones.

The Captain is becoming a great friend of John's and mine. He has a sail-boat, in which he promises to take us across the bay,

some fine day, before we return to town. He calls John "Laddie" now, for he says John is too harsh a name for an "angel-child" — one so fragile as this little boy. I think the Captain must have had Scotch forefathers, for he delights in the use of some few Scotch words and phrases. I am always "lassie" to him, though the name ill fits me, as I am no longer a girl.

The sunsets are very beautiful here on the island. Several of my friends urged me to join them the other afternoon in going to the Sound Beach for a picnic supper, near the old mill. They think me very dull and dreamy, I am sure, and perhaps unsocial, since Tom left me. I finally decided to join them, though it cost me an effort. Little John clung to me some time when I told him that Grandmother would put him to sleep that night, but never a pout or a protest from

John. He only smiled, and when I kissed him good-night and started to leave him, he waved his tiny hand to me. There is much to live for when a little child makes an effort to sacrifice his pleasure for what he supposes is yours, and though everybody who once made my life seem very full of joy and gladness has departed from me, and everything that once was most dear has gone out like a candle in the night, still now there is a new flame that prompts me to live and with greater usefulness, for the beautiful young life of another's fills mine with its almost spiritual presence, and it comes over me that I am very bountifully blessed.

John is becoming very fond of the country. His little go-cart is filled with flowers and meadow grasses and "cats and kittens," a kind of fur-like weed which he fondles as he does the animal for which it is named.

Now that the golden-rod is in bloom, he finds himself a Cræsus enthroned among his golden possessions.

“Eleanore loves flowers, too,” he said to me only yesterday.

“Yes, John, they please me. But you — you delight me far more, my boy,” I found myself making reply.

The other afternoon he called me to him, and in the door of the vine-covered country-house, we listened to the striking of the town clock in the village, some distance away. I could but picture the long ago when I, a little girl, went running to school lest the nine strokes of that clock should have sounded ere I reached the academy. Ah, those mornings of long ago! They loom up on Memory’s horizon, and a glow remains which makes me remember very vividly their many joys and their petty sorrows and trials.

“Eleanore, like our chimes at home in the

hall," I heard little John remarking, his sweet beautiful face turned upward and the expression of interest suffusing his every feature. He, too, was in the power of association, though how different from my own.

The Summer is fast changing its robe. The days are shortening, and we begin to need our wraps in the late afternoon. The sunsets come earlier and John seems so restless. So we must very soon be going back to our small apartment in town. The hollyhocks are fading and losing some of their spinster-like dignity, the phlox is going to seed, and the French lilacs are drooping from their stems. Even the tiger-lily stalks stand flowerless. The sea-weed drifts high upon the beach. The farmers have begun to put on their quaint little thumb huskers and kneel upon mother earth in the desolate fields. The orchards have an odor of cider about

them, for the presses are at work, and the apples lie in quantities under the dusty boughs. The peaches are in abundance, and the grapes hang heavily from the vines. The lumbering wagon of the ice-man seems to make fewer trips each week through the village streets and lanes. The townsfolk are turning their faces westward, and the autumn breezes blow vindictively about the old light-house at Horton's Point.

Our summer has passed very sweetly on this dear old island, but now we must say good-bye to country lanes and to walks by the sea, for John seems a bit weary, and Dr. Leech recommends "treatments," and hopes that the little fellow will use crutches very soon. I think that it will grieve me sadly to see the child struggle with these ugly things. But little John will be patient, — of this we are at all times sure.

Good-bye for this summer, beautiful island.

You and your good people have been sweet indeed to John and me, and we thank you deeply. Why, even the leaves are turning and falling over the way, and the hickory logs crackle and snap as the flames are carried upward through the old brick chimney.

“Often I think of the beautiful town
That is seated by the sea;
Often my thoughts go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town,
And my youth comes back to me.”

VI.

"Since my young days of passion, joy, or pain,
Perchance my heart and harp have lost a string,
And both may jar, — it may be, that in vain
I would essay, as I have sung to sing."

— *Byron.*

JOHN is radiant in the joys of Christmas. The tree and the toys which Dr. Leech bestowed upon him have given him a genuine child-throb of joy. I fear that if he is soon not said nay to he will make himself ill eating so many sweets.

The Doctor dined with us to-day, and has been teaching John to use his crutches. When the Doctor had placed one under one arm, and was offering him the second, he hesitated for a moment, and then beckoned me to him.

“Eleanore have one, too.”

The tears came to my eyes in spite of every effort. Would that I might share the bodily inconvenience and suffering of little John! But finally my courage came, and I took it and got down to fit the short little crutch, and hobbled around to his amusement. He laughed, and his sweet voice filled the rooms with the merriment I was causing, though he realized not that he was making light of his own misfortune.

Dr. Leech has grown very near to me since John came into my life. It is to him that I go for advice concerning the child, and sometimes he ventures to advise me to see more of people! Ah, but he does not understand! When the boy is older, and a little stronger, we shall travel. New sights will amuse him. It, perhaps, may best be soon, for he seems to have developed restlessness to

an alarming degree, and I fancy that a decided change of atmosphere and surroundings may soothe the boy.

A tiny little miss who lives over the way from us is John's little playmate, and our nearest neighbor. She seemed fearful of John at first, his serious eyes seemed to sadden her. John thought it was his crutches, and tried to hide them so as not to distress the tiny young lady, but now that she knows the child they are devoted friends, and she cares for him and protects him, as he would protect her if he were not hampered by bodily ills. They sit together in the high window-seats, and advance infantile theories about all that they see, looking out over the house-tops. It charms me to listen to them, she is so gay and healthy. There is a charm and brilliancy about quaint Alice that seems to almost fascinate little John.

I sometimes wonder what manner of par-

ents John's were to have cast him out because of his deformity. There is a bitter truth, and I rejoice that I know it not. It will be a cruel duty to some day have to explain to the boy that we are one another's only by adoption, and God help me !

The child spends part of these long wintry days in learning to read and write. A sweet young woman with a wonderful knowledge of children is guiding him in this new road.

Last night a heavy snow fell, and the flakes scattered like so much confetti at a European *fête*. John expressed a desire to catch a few, for he said that they were the stars falling from the sky. Little John, you surely must be the little angel who fell as a star to earth while Saint Peter slept. Your thoughts seem almost supernatural.

Our grate-fire has been so comfortable to-day, and John and I have spent most of the day on a swinging divan, reading weird

tales of strange animals in far-off lands. Alice and Dr. Leech have both been in to see us. The Doctor plays sweetly, and to-day he sat down before the keys and played that exquisite prayer from Lohengrin which would bring the vilest sinner to the seat of repentance, so strongly does it work upon the very best in a being. The prayer is still ringing in my ears as a forest echo seems to sound and sound again after a storm has passed. The children's chatter began again as soon as the final chord was struck, and I found myself away in a revery which took me back to the sweet past, which holds nearly all of the blessings that were ever mine,—holds them fast in its tenacious clutches, and suddenly yields them up to either aggravate or soothe me, as Fate will !

How exquisite the bitter-sweet on the book-case is ; its glow of color seems to give me new courage. I met some of Tom's and

-my old friends this morning. Such contentment seems to be theirs. Surely it would have been the same with me had the dear sweetheart lived. But I am fading, oh, so fast. Only this morning John was stroking my hair, and finding a gray lock he played with it lovingly for a moment, and then patting my head once more before speaking, a look of surprise coming over his face, he said:

“Eleanore, it is like the silver shells we found last summer on Peconic Bay Beach.”

“Yes, and yours, dear, are like the gold ones we found on the same day along the same shore.”

How the sunshine likes those golden curls.

It is a weary wait, and yet for John's sake it is made possible. I played upon my harp this morning for the first time in many years. John stood on his little crutches amazed and delighted, and of a sudden I realized how selfish in my sorrow I had been all these

months, for I should not have allowed my grief to have thrown shadows on this precious little life. Not since that afternoon, too grievous to recall, when word was brought to me of Tom's accident and for me to hurry to him, had I played until now. I hardly believed that I could again, but, —

“Eleanore, play more, dearest. It makes both little legs feel alike. You've never made music for John before.”

After this I cannot deny him pleasure, in harboring a sentiment or inclination of my own. His ear for time is very correct, and occasionally he seizes one crutch and waves it through space as an orchestra leader does his baton, and, thus supported, I play on.

It is once more Easter, and the day has been a happy one for John and me. This morning he found, among a lot of old cards which I gave him to amuse himself with

during the wait between the end of service and our dinner hour, one decorated with an allegorical representation of the rejoicing caused in heaven upon the Resurrection morn. A beautiful angel was playing the harp. He did not quite seem to grasp the meaning.

“What are you doing, Eleanore, among the clouds playing your harp?”

“That is not I, dearie.”

What a beautiful world this would be if we were all as innocent as this little child. But the years are few and the time short before the secret guarded so long by his good angel is out: that I am only a selfish, sinning mortal, hiding my sorrow in his young life. Ah, may I be none the less dear to him when the ideal veil of perfection falls and he sees me as I am.

VII.

"Oh, Autumn ! why so soon
Depart the hues that make thy forests glad,
Thy gentle wind and thy fair sunny noon,
And leave thee wild and sad ? "

— *Bryant.*

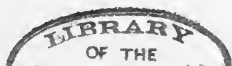
THE summers come and the winters go, and autumn is here again. The maple leaves cover the avenue with a cloth of red and gold. The birds begin to flap their wings in restlessness. Soon they will fly to warmer climes, and all nature will find itself songless except for human efforts. John and I are restless, too. His frail body seems to illy stand our winters, and his little face grows the more beautiful each day. I cling to this

"Gentle boy, with soft and silken locks,
A dreamy boy, with brown and tender eyes,"
almost as helplessly as he to me, and we are

each other's. For how long? comes the faint, answerless question.

Dr. Leech has built up a barrier between himself and me. He has attempted to wear poor Tom's glasses, and I can never look back responsively, for all my hopes, all my life, are centred in little John. Why will he urge my shattered, half-spent life playing any part in his full and hopeful one. Ah me, few women understand most men, until it is too late. He claims that his life has been a very empty one, that mine has been so full. Full?—full of the deepest sorrow and the deepest love for my crippled angel. Was it the fall from the sky that gave you all this suffering? John loves me; John needs me; John shall have me.

We are about to start on a long journey over the seas, where John will, I hope, grow stronger, I freer,—and Dr. Leech will learn to realize that the impossible is the unchangeable.



VIII.

“Far to the right, where Apennine ascends
Bright as the summer, Italy extends;
Its uplands sloping deck the mountain's side,
Woods over woods in gay theatric pride,
While oft some temple's mouldering tops between,
With venerable grandeur mark the scene.
Could Nature's bounty satisfy the breast,
The sons of Italy were surely blest.”

— *Oliver Goldsmith.*



WE are nearing Naples. Mary is with us. She came to me willingly, and I was much gratified to find her heart still full of the love she seems to bear for the little child. He sits between us in his steamer chair, rolled up in a warm rug, with the soft caressing breeze of the Mediterranean fanning his brow. — Ah, what a beautiful sunset !

John is twelve years old now, and not so large as the average boy of those years ; but he is brave, and uses his crutches gracefully

for a cripple. To-day he startled me by saying —

“Eleanore, boys have mothers. Are you mine?”


“God gave us to one another, dear, because I was very selfish. And you were very much alone in the world, and so was I, dear; for this we love each other dearly. John, you have made me a far better woman than I should ever have been without you.”

“Ah,” he simply said, and fell back in his steamer chair, and allowed himself to be lulled to sleep by the motion of the ship. And I closed my eyes and thought and thought, and when I opened them again old Vesuvius could be seen plainly. Our voyage is soon to end. Our next day will be upon foreign shores, — the romantic shores of old Italy. Fair country by the sea, we greet you!

IX.

"Something the heart must have to cherish
Must love and joy and sound and learn,
Something with passion clasp or perish
And in itself to ashes burn.
So to this child my heart is clinging,
And its frank eyes, with look intense,
Me from a world of sin are bringing
Back to a world of innocence."

— *Translated from the German.*

 JOHN likes Naples. He expresses a very great desire to go soon to the Aquarium. The fishes will interest him. The street musicians are his chief delight here, and he fancies that he would like to learn to play the mandolin as the little street gamins do. They came under our windows last night, and he went to sleep and into the alluring dreamland to the air of "Belle Napoli" — "Sweet boy of Naples, fare thee well," — and so must we, and then away to some of your charming environs.

At Amalfi.

Here we are, hundreds of feet above the Gulf of Salerno, nicely tucked away in the Capuchin Monastery. John enthuses over the place, and Signor Vozzi, who is a delightful old character, and the proprietor of this quaint place, which calls itself a hotel, has taken a fancy to the boy. Yesterday morning I went out on the terrace in search of John. There sat the old gentleman, and John beside him. The entertaining Italian was telling John of the monastery and the town just below the hill. Then we all went into the chapel, and there two old bagpipe players were sending up their strains to the blessed Virgin. The air of past ages one breathes here, and even in the refectory an ever-present blessing seems breathed out upon us all, as we sit at meat and break bread. Silence, however, is rarely observed, so how different are the meals of to-day from those of the monks in years past.

John, Mary, and I each have a cell in which we sleep and are hushed to rest by the splashing of the waves on the shore below. Signor Vozzi and John are becoming inseparable, and I fear it will be very hard to persuade the boy that it is best to go on soon, and leave this rambling old monastery by the Gulf of Salerno. Last night we sat together and read Longfellow's "Amalfi," which begins thus :

"Sweet the memory is to me
Of a land beyond the sea
Where the waves and mountains meet."

John loves the roses that grow on the terrace, and he is permitted, through the indulgence of Signor Vozzi, to make his own selection. The cats and kittens, particular pets of the Italians, are his as well, and he goes about the court-yard and around the terrace with his eyes full of joy, the cats at his heels, the roses in his blouse, and the words upon his lips : "Eleanore, let us stay here

always." But John's cough seems to trouble him so near the sea, so we must hurry inland, though it pleases him to stay.

Our first mail from America has reached us. Among the other letters is one from Dr. Leech. He writes :

"If I may ever be of service to you or the boy, cable 'Come.' Why did you go so far away? I seem to be groping in the dark. You forbid my hoping,—all is shadows. But I pray that the most glorious sunlight may ever play across the path of you and little John. I still like to feel that between you and me there is one thing, if never another, in common — the love for the boy."

Sorrento, Italy.

Sorrento, with your dancers, you are charming. The peasants in their gayly colored costumes, in the "Tarrantella," are delightful. We have but just come in from buying a cap

for Alice Wade and an inlaid table for the Doctor. This was John's thought for him, and I am glad to have him think of the kind friends who have been so devoted to him all these years.

We had a delightful letter of introduction to F. Marion Crawford, who lives not far from here, on the road leading from Amalfi to Sorrento. We sent the letter to him last evening, and he sent a line of welcome to us an hour or so later. So, early this morning, after the shower had made this little world fresh and beautiful, we made our way to the home of this busy author. We were shown into a very large room which had about it the atmosphere of the man of letters, and was as luxurious as it was different from the living-room in the average house. His private apartment where his books are "manufactured," to quote his own words, is very enticing, and

the entire atmosphere of the whole place, both inside and out, is so restful, beautiful, and ideal, in every respect, that we could see how almost anyone could be inspired with the desire, at least, to write, read, and live here.

Mr. Crawford was most cordial, and showed true American hospitality, though other countries claim him. One thing he said in response to one of my inquiries as to the real mental condition of Paul Patoff's mother was —

“I've almost forgotten. Haven't read that book in some time.”

Naturally we were amused to find that the creator of this strange psychological problem of a woman hardly remembered what her true condition had been according to his own genius. John met the Crawford children and thought them very amusing little folks.

Rome, Italy.

Here we are, in Rome. John likes the Piazza at the foot of the Spanish stairs best of all the other squares in this ancient city, so he tells me, for here the models in their artistic rags flock about him and wish to have their pictures taken, for we have a camera with us. Most of his centimes go to them.

This afternoon we wandered into the little church at the head of these same stairs, and heard the nuns sing at Benediction. Their "Ave Maria" suggested to John that they might be angels, as they stood so high above us behind the iron railing, all robed in white, and sending their sweet soulful voices into the church below.

The tremendous ruins John does n't care for. They frighten him, he says, and it wearies him sadly getting about on his crutches. Tourists seem to show what they

feel, when he comes near, and their pity seems to annoy him. He likes the sculptures in the Vatican museum, but he says that he fears to be near the chambers of His Holiness the Pope. He thinks he may come out some day and reprove him for not being a little Catholic boy. Yesterday he bought a very pretty rosary to take the village priest on the island where we have spent so many of our summers. We had it sent in and blessed by His Holiness. It will add value to it in the estimation of Father O'Dean.

Neither John, Mary, nor I slept well last night. In the afternoon we went to see the Church of the Capuchins, where the skeletons of long since departed ecclesiastics are now come to be mural decorations. The sight of them left such a ghastly impression on our minds that we agree we like Guido Reni's painting of "Saint Michael and the Dragon,"

which adorns the side wall of the church, very much better than this vandal-like array of bones.

The fountains John thinks very curious, and the beautiful painting of the "Aurora" which adorns the ceiling of the Respighiosi Palace has captivated the fanciful mind of our little lad. "It is all like a cloud picture, Eleanore," he says.

We have made a visit to the Capitoline Hill, and the statue of Marcus Aurelius I admire very much. The jewel-bedecked "Bombino," in the chapel near by, is one of the shrines about which all devout believing Catholics pay homage. Its healing powers are world-renowned, and the journeys it has made to many a sick-bed are told of with pride and reverence by the priest who takes you about the church which harbors this sacred relic of the holy cross. We have enjoyed our visit to the Museum and the city

courts, the statues and the church, but I fear it has been too fatiguing for John, and we must not come again soon. He cannot be unnecessarily wearied.

The Queen drives on the Pincion Hill often. To-day we saw her as she rolled by in state. Her graciousness is her particular charm, and her beauty has for a long time been the pride of all Italy. John enjoys watching the schoolboys here in Rome. He thinks he would enjoy being a student here in the city of the ancients. How limited are his pleasures because of his frail health. Dear little fellow, how patient always!

Florence.

Florence, with your old towers and bridges, your river and your streets, your forsaken palaces and your museums and your beautiful surrounding country, you are charming. There is a fascination about you that is irresistible.

Each day you show us some new delight. Nurse wheels John about in his wheel chair in the afternoons on the Lungarno. He comes home telling me of the soldiers and the officers he sees on his promenade.

When we go down into the busier quarters of the city he always wishes to be taken to the Strozzi Palace to see the lanterns. He says he had rather see things of this sort, though he, with me, admires little "Saint John" in the Ritti Palace, and he smiled wonderingly and sweetly when I told him that he resembled that ideal little face.

Nurse and I hardly see how Tito could have drowned himself in the Arno, if it is always as low as it is at present.

To-day we were at San Miniato. It is beyond the city walls, beautifully located above the valley of the Arno. A very magnificent bronze cast of Michael Angelo's "David" has been placed on the highest

point, and we rested on the marble seats, getting new strength and courage from the youthful slayer of the Biblical giant.

To-morrow we are going to drive beyond the walls in quite another direction. The Monks of Chertosa have their picturesque monastery out there, and we are going to pay our adieus to these white-robed friars, and bring some of their far-famed Chatrieux and perfumes away with us. John wants to play once more in the court-yard about the old carven-stone well-curb before he says good-bye to Firenze. Good-bye, dear lily city. Sweet and peaceful has been our sojourn in Frau Angelico's sainted city. And it seems it must be good-bye to Italy as well, for John is failing fast. Must I believe that he is slipping away from me? Is the precious flame of life to be extinguished ere I can carry the dear child back to our native shore? Mary admits to me that she is much alarmed over his con-

dition. He clings to me, and there is a pathos that I dare not realize means we are soon to part.

He hums to himself one of my old harp tunes, a Scotch air Tom loved so well and that the little child has heard me play so often at home. It makes me faint at heart to hear him, but if it gives him pleasure I must, and I will, allow the old association to bind, rather than separate, Tom and little John.

Glorious Italy, thy blue sky has brightened our days upon your historic soil. But our ship sails from Genoa to-morrow, and soon this fair land will be to us only an exquisite memory. Addio ! Addio !

X.

"Why should we faint and fear to live alone,
Since all alone, Heaven has willed, we die?
Nor even the tenderest heart and next our own
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh."

— *Keble.*



WE are on the sea. John seems very feeble, but is patient, and Nurse and I never leave him. How should I bear this — surely my last sorrow, since I have no more to lose — if it were not for the moral support of faithful, peaceful-faced Nursy, whom John and I have grown to love dearly since our journey began.

We are almost at home, though. John is frail indeed, and I fear there will be little strength remaining when the time to land comes. He will be unable to use his crutches,

we feel sure, by the time the ship drops anchor in New York Harbor.

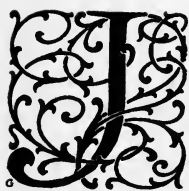
Ah, there is good Dr. Leech. He has come to greet us upon our return. How good it seems to see his strong, dignified face when we all need comforting so much just now. And how glad John seems to see his old and faithful friend once more. But when I look at Mary I can but assume an air of joyfulness, too, for her face is covered with blushes and pleasure, and I now guess for the first time her secret, which she has guarded so carefully from me all these years — she loves Dr. Leech.

XI.

"The past is over and fled ;
Named new, we name it old.
Thereof some tale has been told ;
But no word comes from the dead,
Whether at all they be,
Or whether as bond or free,
Or whether they too were we,
Or by what spell they have sped.

"Still we say as we go,
Strange to think by the way
Whatever there is to know
That shall we know one day."

— *Dante Gabriel Rossetti.*

 JOHN went to his heavenly home in the spring. He lingered only a few weeks after we reached our native shore. Each day his thoughtful brown eyes seemed to grow the deeper, until they resembled the heavenly depths themselves.

One day, late in the afternoon, just as the sun was setting, he called me to him, and put-

ting his two wasted arms about my neck, kissed me on the forehead, and said, oh, so gently and softly :

“Eleanore, will you tell Captain that I’m ready now to sail away across the bay?”

And then pointing to the two little crutches that stood in the corner, his breath coming quickly and with evident difficulty, —

“I think I hear the angels playing on many harps, Eleanore, and there are, oh, so many voices seeming to say ‘You will not need your crutches here’ — so they are yours, Eleanore. Good-bye.”

And before I could believe my own eyes he had relaxed his hold about my neck and had fallen back upon his pillow, — and now only the fragile wasted form lay before me to remind me of the lily-white soul that had soared above my grasp.

We have laid him in the old-time village

churchyard here on the island, — a peaceful spot. Here, in this quaint old village, he spent his last beautiful days without a murmur, ever patient to the end. The villagers asked for the privilege of keeping the small lot and grave green, and have planted flowers to the memory of little John, for he is at rest.

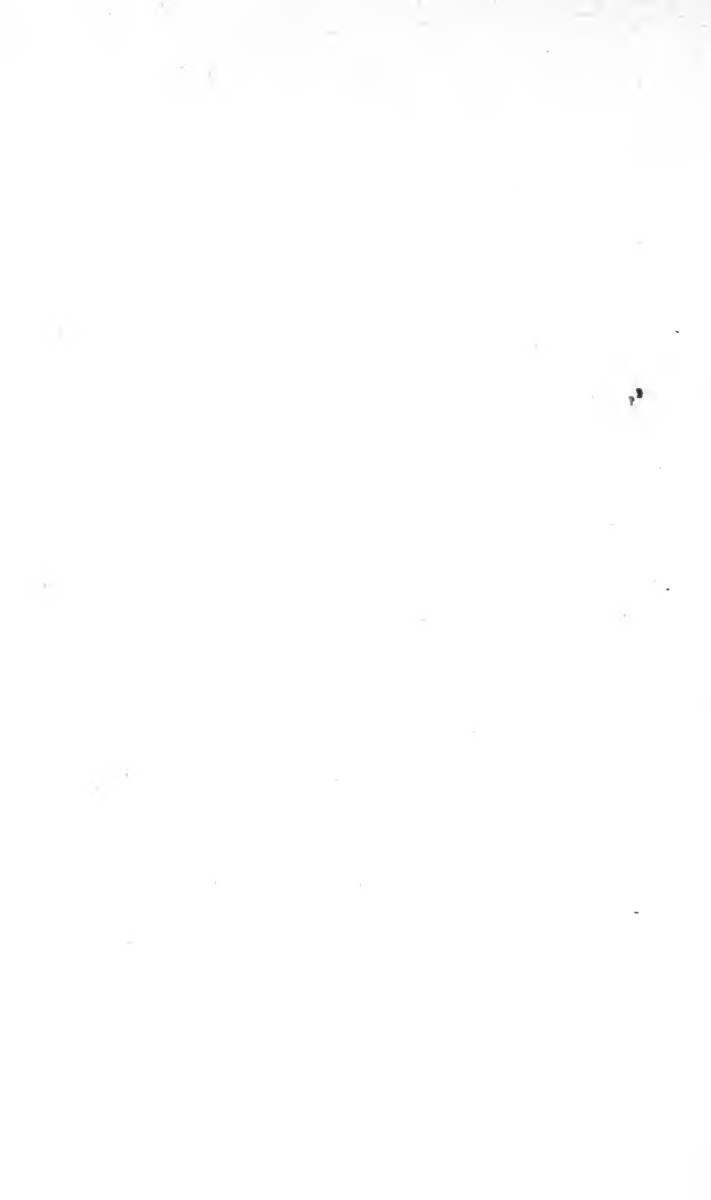
Twelve years of beautiful companionship, little John, — now you are with the others. Tom knows you now, and so do the parents. I am waiting, waiting. But patient I must be, for the angel-child was patient always, though he suffered much and constantly. John's sweet, beautiful life reminds me of an impressive sunset I once saw at sea. As the great body seemed to sink, the gold of its fire seemed to mellow into a faint wonderful shade of the very palest yellow I have ever seen, and the whole horizon was lit up by the most delicate shades of blue, rose, and violet.

This coloring was reflected on the very edges of a few cumulus clouds, and even the deeper depths of the heavens seemed colored by the after-glow. It made the entire sea world resemble an exquisite opal; and such a vivid picture remains with me that I shall not soon forget this unusual display of nature's jewels, — and thus the little life of my John, my little dream-child, seems to me now. Twelve years! and yet it seems only a day, and sometimes even shorter. But so full of warmth and color, so full of gentleness and forbearance, so aglow with a heavenly shading, a gem of an existence it will remain, as that sunset is a veritable gem-picture on Memory's wall.

Dr. Leech and Mary are married now, and in a few days I am going to visit them. The harp has been taken up to the hospital, and I

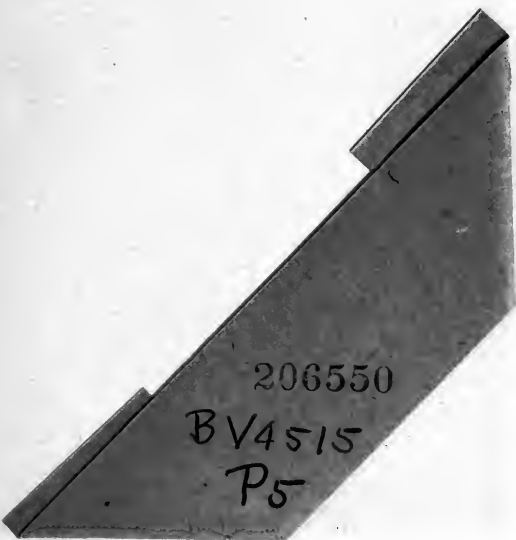
have been persuaded to play for the children every week. This I am going to do, for He said "What thou doest unto the least of these thou doest unto me." And until it comes my turn to "sail across the bay," and I hear Tom, my parents, and little John calling over the ferry, "Come," I shall play on.











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